

Houston Health

Fall 2003
Houston Department of
Health and Human Services



A Quarterly Newsletter for Advisory Councils of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services

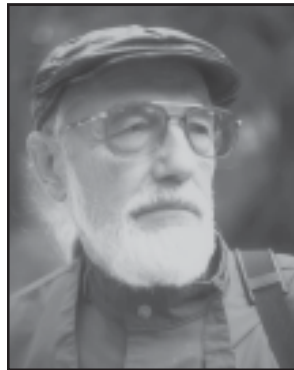
Focus on the Area Agency on Aging

Services offer support to seniors

Harris County is home to approximately 372,000 people 60 years and older. The seniors' income, race and health status impact their quality of life and their need for health and supportive services from public and private entities as well as support from family members and friends.

The Harris County Area Agency on Aging at the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) is responsible for planning, contracting and providing direct services for older adults throughout the county. Services offered by the agency include nutrition services consisting of meals delivered either directly to homebound seniors or to 43 congregate sites, transportation, legal assistance, preventive health services, instruction and training, recreational and physical fitness activities, ombudsman services and in-home support encompassing personal care and homemaker and respite assistance for frail seniors.

Commonly referred to as AAA because of its initials, the agency was established in 1977 to provide services for elderly Harris County residents as mandated under the Older Americans Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments. HDHHS acquired the agency in the summer of



1985.

Today's changing family and community structure presents added challenges in caregiver support for many of the elderly. Challenges include:

- The mobilization of family members, which creates obstacles to caregiving since many adult children or other family members do not reside in the same city as their parents

or other older family members.

- Increases in longevity, creating situations where many older caregivers, particularly older women, must care for older spouses and other older relatives.

- Increased employment opportunities for women and household income requirements for today's families have reduced the number of

see Misconceptions, Page 2

Harris County Area Agency on Aging 713-794-9001

Caregivers face array of issues, require support

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women who once were traditional “housewives.”

- Increased single parents, incarcerated parents, parents addicted to drugs and alcohol and young victims of abuse or neglect have created a group of children now being raised by grandparents age 60 or older.

A few of the many critical issues caregivers face include assistance with placement in and financial support for long-term care facilities, caregiver burnout and depression, sibling conflict about appropriate care, grandparents’ legal rights and

financial assistance for grandparents serving as primary caregivers for children.

The agency maintains efforts to develop a network of family caregiver support and public awareness programs that address and meet the caregiving needs of this growing population. AAA supports caregiver programs including respite aide training for individuals with dementia, Chinese caregiver support groups, caregiver counseling and congregational-based volunteer respite caregiver teams.

AAA recognizes the value that caregivers offer in the provision of

long-term care to primarily older adults and the toll it takes in performing this role. During the next four years, AAA will continue to support caregiver programs which target limited English-speaking caregivers, caregivers who may be at risk for abusing and neglecting the elderly, older caregivers of people with disabilities and grandparents who are primary caregivers for children younger than 18.

In this issue, *Houston Health* offers an overview of the services that assist the elderly and their families with options that promote independence, well-being and dignity.

What are responsibilities of AAA?

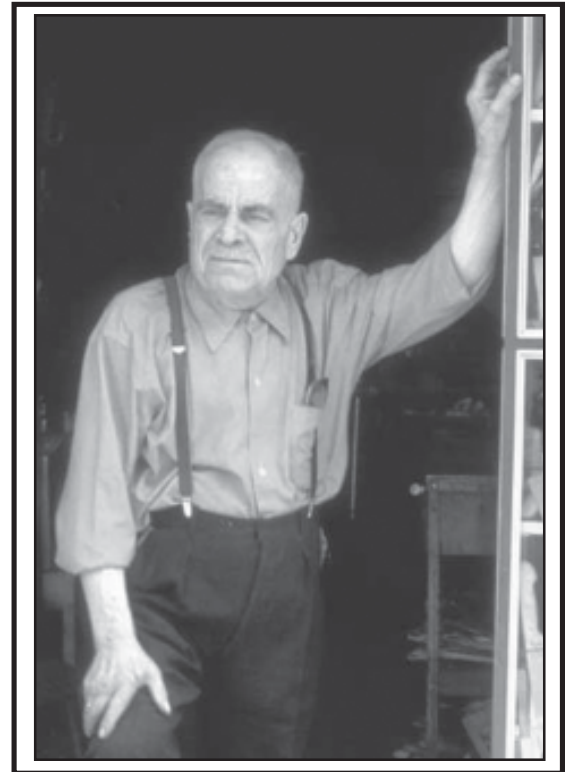
Under the overall goal of a comprehensive community-based service delivery system, the Harris County Area Agency on Aging has the following federally-mandated responsibilities:

- Determine the need for social and nutrition services with special attention given to those elderly in greatest economic or social need.
- Advocate for the elderly by increasing the awareness of service providers, elected officials, civic groups and the corporate and voluntary sectors regarding the needs of the elderly.
- Utilize federal funds to fill identified service needs.
- Provide technical assistance and training related to aging programs and services to service providers and private sector organizations.

Services Provided

Through contracts and coordination with local service providers, the AAA can assist the elderly with:

- Adult day care
- Benefits counseling
- Care coordination services
- Counseling services
- Congregate and home delivered meals
- Dental services
- Educational opportunities
- Employment
- Emergency food and shelter
- Financial assistance, benefits and discounts
- Government services
- Hearing-related services
- Hospice services
- Home improvement programs
- Housing (subsidized and non-subsidized)
- Information referral and assistance
- In-home services
- Legal services
- Literacy classes and tutoring
- Membership organizations
- Nursing home information and assistance
- Protective services
- Recreational services
- Senior centers
- Services for the sensory impaired
- Tax assistance
- Utility assistance
- Volunteer programs
- Vision-related services



Information Referral and Assistance

Information Referral and Assistance (IR&A) is the entry point to access and assistance services. IR&A is staffed by information and referral specialists who are knowledgeable of resources within the community and provide referrals and resources to beneficiaries and their family members or caregivers. IR&A coordinates the outreach program by participating in community events such as health fairs, workshops and townhall meetings. When requested, IR&A also provides resource materials to agencies for their outreach activities. Clients can contact information and referral specialists by telephone, electronic mail, written correspondence, fax or in person.

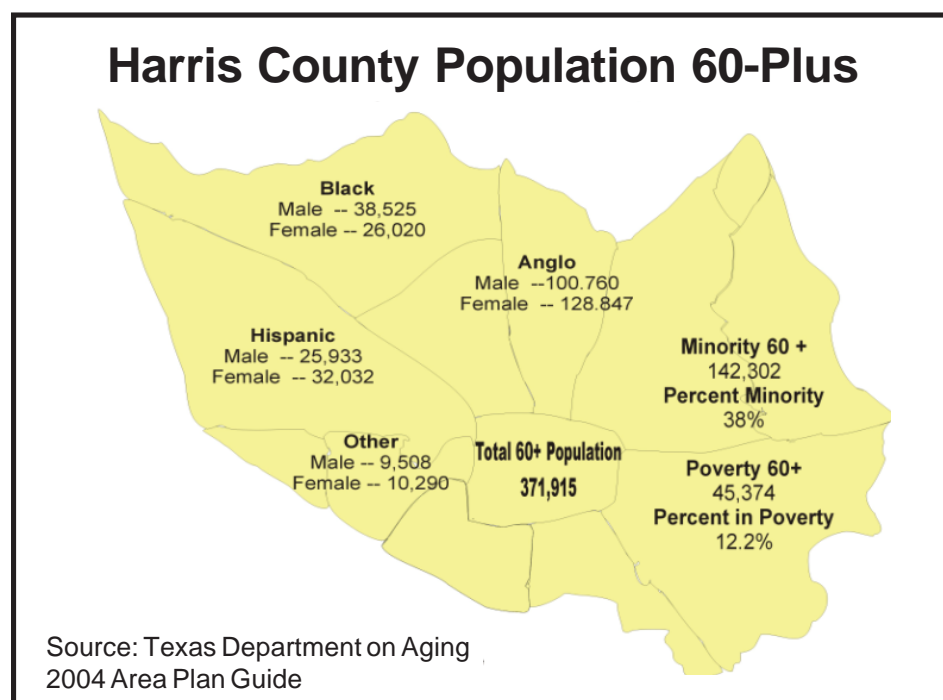
Calls are answered by information and referral specialists weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. A voice mail system is operational after business hours and messages are returned the following business day.

Nutrition Services

The Nutrition Program serves senior citizens a nutritionally-balanced meal on weekdays, except holidays, through a network of congregate sites and home-delivered meal service throughout Harris County.

Congregate meal centers offer activities that provide seniors opportunities to socialize and exercise, receive health education, information and assistance and take advantage of a variety of other life-enhancing programs.

To qualify for the home-delivered meal program, a person must be at least 60 years of age, reside within Harris County and have an impair-



ment that prevents attendance at a nutrition center. Participants are visited and reassessed for eligibility every six months.

Persons interested in participating in the nutrition program may contact the AAA for the nearest service provider.

AAA provides transportation to selected nutrition sites in Harris County for participants who meet selected eligibility requirements. AAA also supplements the funding of other organizations' nutrition transportation. Requests for other types of transportation for elderly residents are referred to the appropriate programs or agency.

In-Home Care

Homemaker

Basic in-home chore assistance permits elderly individuals to remain at home despite limited self-care capabilities. Homemakers are assigned to visit the homebound elderly on a regular basis and assist with the routines of daily living, not to exceed 12 hours in a given week. Assistance includes:

- Home management
- Housekeeping
- Meal preparation
- Escort and shopping
- Reading and writing

Personal Assistance

This service includes assistance with all tasks identified in Home-maker, plus activities related to the client's physical health. Assigned tasks and hours per week are determined by the program supervisor and can include:

- Bathing
- Dressing
- Grooming
- Routine hair and skin care
- Toileting
- Help seniors with walking
- Homemaker services
- In-home respite care

Caregiver Respite

Respite representatives recruit and train volunteers to provide in-home respite care for families of the elderly suffering with Alzheimer's disease and the frail elderly. Care teams work in groups of two offering supportive services as well as companionship.

Benefits Counseling

Benefits Counseling, like all programs funded by AAA, is available for people 60 years and older residing in Harris County. However, benefits counseling services, also known as HICAP (Health, Information, Counseling and Advocacy Program), are extended to all Medicare beneficiaries, including those with disabilities, regardless of age under special funds provided by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the federal agency that administers Medicare. The mission of the benefits counseling program is to provide accurate and objective counseling, assistance and advocacy related to public benefits and entitlements.

Training

Benefits counselors receive certification as HICAP counselors. They receive training in various services by representatives of the following agencies:

- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- Texas Legal Services Center
- Texas Department of Insurance
- Texas Department on Aging
- Texas Department of Human Services
- Social Security Administration
- Veterans Administration

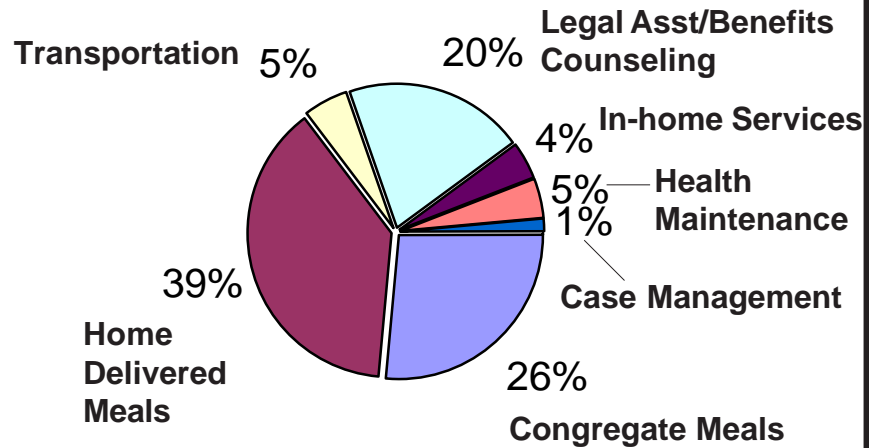
as well as from local community service agencies.

Services

The Older Americans Act authorizes Benefits Counseling services to assist older individuals, their family members or caregivers in

- understanding their rights
- applying for benefits and receiving appropriate referrals
- exercising choice
- benefiting from services and

Harris County Area Agency on Aging FY02 Clients by Service Category



opportunities authorized by law, and

- maintaining the rights of older persons, especially those with reduced capacity, in solving disputes.

Counseling is provided in person, via telephone or written correspondence.

Beneficiaries can receive assistance involving the following issues:

- Activities of daily living
- Client representation: appeals or hearings
- Consumer issues
- Fraud, scams, unfair sales
- Housing
- Individual rights-abuse, dispute, employment, discrimination
- Institutional or facility care
- Long-term care insurance
- Managed care plans and Medicare+Choice, HMOs and private fee for services
- Medicaid
- Medicare
- Medications
- Medigap or supplemental insurance
- Non-covered health and dental services, hearing, assistance

devices

- Other types of insurance: individual and group, Cobra
- Other retirement: teacher, railroad, public and private plans
- Social Security
- Surrogate decision: advanced directives, guardianship, wills, estates
- Transportation
- Veterans benefits

Counselors work with representatives from partner agencies such as the Social Security Administration, Texas Department of Health and Human Services, Texas Department of Insurance, Legal Hotline for Older Texans, Medicaid, Medicare, Adult Protective Services and other federal, state, local and community agencies to resolve client issues. For legal services requiring an attorney, the agency contracts with Lone Star Legal Aid.

Free Services

As mandated by the Older Americans Act, all services provided by the agency are free. However, recipients are provided an opportunity to make voluntary contributions to the program.

Ombudsman Program

A long-term care ombudsman is a specially trained and certified volunteer who advocates for quality care in Texas nursing facilities. An ombudsman has the resources of the Texas Department of Aging and other agencies to help resolve complaints and concerns that cannot be resolved by residents and staff.

Objectives of the program are to:

- intervene on behalf of the elderly in long-term-care facilities to assure quality of care,
- support nursing home standards so that residents are provided a dependable and acceptable level of care,
- serve as a link with the community to advocate for quality-of-life issues,
- investigate, negotiate, mediate or initiate the resolution of complaints and difficulties, and
- improve communication between residents and facility staff.

Anyone admitting a relative or loved one to a long-term-care facility needs to make sure the admission packet includes "Resident's Rights," a statement of minimum standards to which any facility should adhere.

Respite Aide Instruction Training

Through a contractual arrangement, respite aide training is provided for workers interested in assisting families of Alzheimer's patients, clients with dementia or AIDS and the frail elderly. The program involves both classroom and hands-on instruction. Lectures by volunteer professionals and chapter staff include discussions on:

- Overview of the related disorders
- Physical care of the patient



- Communication
- Managing difficult behavior
- Research updates
- Activities
- Safety tips
- Nutrition
- Wellness for the caregiver
- End-of-life health care decisions
- Bereavement and coping with loss

These 32-hour workshops are offered four times a year. Enrollees receive all necessary materials at no cost, but are allowed to contribute to help defray training expenses. A certificate given upon completion of the training certifies the recipient as capable of providing respite care for families on an as-needed basis.

Aquatic program

An aquatic water exercise program provides therapeutic treatment for stroke and arthritic sufferers.

Special Projects

- AAA's special projects include:
- Older Americans Month: This month is dedicated to the older adult and is highlighted by

various activities throughout May.

- Southwest Airlines Home for the Holidays: An annual program which awards complimentary airline tickets to senior citizens, enabling them to visit family and friends during the holiday season.
- Ho.M.E. (Houston's Meals for the Elderly): Private sector funding of a supplementary meal program for the homebound elderly, serving meals on holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- Texas Silver-Haired Legislature: Five representatives from Harris County are elected by their peers (over age 60). Prior to each state legislative session, 116 Silver-Haired Legislators from throughout Texas meet to debate and prioritize issues to be addressed.

**Harris County Area
Agency on Aging
713-794-9001**

Distribution of repellents targets at-risk seniors

The Harris County Area Agency of Aging distributed mosquito repellents to area seniors enrolled in its programs. The DEET-based repellents will help protect low-income seniors against West Nile Virus infections resulting from the bites of infected mosquitoes.

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) obtained in September more than 10,000 containers of mosquito repellents from the DEET Education Program, administered by the Consumer Specialty Products Association. Three repellent manufacturers donated the products: SC Johnson, maker of OFF repellents; Spectrum Brands, maker of Cutter and Repel repellents; and 3M, maker of Ultrathon repellents.

Since the summer HDHHS has confirmed more than 40 cases of infection with West Nile Virus and two deaths. Last year HDHHS reported five deaths and 97 confirmed or probable West Nile Virus cases.

Low-income seniors are a segment of the population at greatest risk for severe illness and death from West Nile virus.

People usually develop symptoms three to 15 days after infection with the virus. There is no specific treat-



U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (center) holds up a container of repellent as she shakes the hand of a participant in the Harris County Area Agency on Aging seniors program at Kashmere Multi-Service Center while Susan Anderson (left) with the DEET Education Program and Dr. M. desVignes-Kendrick, director, HDHHS, address questions from other seniors.

ment for West Nile encephalitis, but in severe cases people will receive intensive support therapy that may include hospitalization, intravenous fluids, airway management, respiratory support (ventilator), prevention of secondary infections and good nursing care.

Precautions against mosquito bites can reduce the risk of infection:

- Wear protective clothing such as

long sleeves and slacks while outdoors at dawn and early in the evening.

- Use an insect repellent with the active ingredient DEET and follow label instructions.
- Use other deterrent devices such as citronella and repellent coils.

Keeping mosquitoes out of homes requires the checking of windows and door screens for openings and replacing or repairing them if necessary. Also, openings such as those around air conditioning window units need to be sealed.

Infected mosquitoes, mostly from the many varieties of the *Culex* species, transmit West Nile virus. *Culex* mosquitoes abound in Houston.

Houston's milder winter temperatures make it impossible to discount the possibility of year-round transmission.

Houston Health Newsletter

is published quarterly by the

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